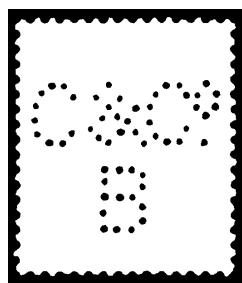


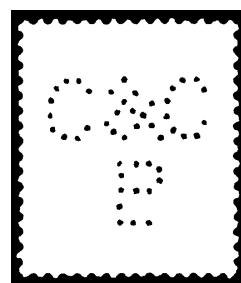
## MAD AS A HATTER!

Roy Gault

I must admit, ‘Serendipity’ played an important part in this piece. While looking for something else, I noticed ‘by happy chance’ a similarity between two other dies, one of which turned out to be a modified version of the other - the two dies are shown below.



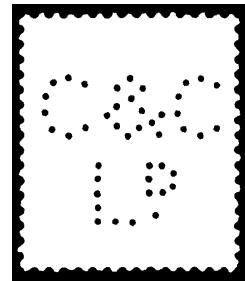
C1550.02



C1420.01

The left-hand illustration is a new die reported by Dave Hill, on a Queen Victoria ‘Lilac & Green’ issue dated 1884, whereas the one on the right is already known and appears in the ‘old’ Edwards-Gault Illustrated Catalogue. My holdings of the latter die show it was used in both London and Stockport, but the user is as yet unknown.

Now, ‘Tomkins’ lists the user of C1430.01 “C&C/L<sup>d</sup>.” (in use 1895-1945) as ‘**Christy & Co Ltd, Stockport**’, so could they also have been the user of C1420.01, and if so, can they be tied in with the “B” in C1550.02?



C1430.01

The answer, I believe, is Yes!

The world-renown hat making firm which later became known as ‘Christy & Co Ltd’ was founded way back in 1773, as a partnership between two Quakers - Miller Christy and Joseph Storrs - in premises in White Hart Court, London. Their hat making business thrived and in 1788 they moved to larger premises in Gracechurch Street which later became their ‘Head Office’.

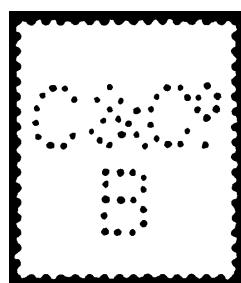
Joseph Storrs retired in 1794 followed by Miller Christy in 1804, but by that time three sons of Miller Christy - Thomas, William and John -

were in control of the partnership. It was during their tenure that hat making factories were opened in **Bermondsey** (London SE), Frampton Cotterell (Gloucestershire) and Wray (Lancashire).

The company also ‘bought in’ hats from other hat manufacturers located in various parts of the country, in particular the firm of ‘T & J Worsley’ who were based in **Stockport**. On the retirement of the Worsleys in 1826, their premises and hat making business in Canal Street, Stockport, were taken over by the Christy brothers.

Hat production continued apace at their works in Bermondsey (by then the largest hat making factory in the world), and the site in Stockport greatly increased by the purchase of the High Gate Cotton Mill adjacent to the Canal Street premises. In 1887 the partnership took on limited liability status, which brings us back to their use of Perfins.

1884-1887

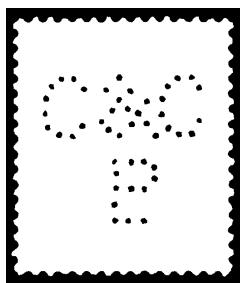


C1550.02

It would appear that the die “C&C<sup>o</sup>/B” was used at **Bermondsey**, but only for a short time in its original condition. When the company became ‘Limited’ in 1887, pins were simply removed from the “B” to leave an incomplete “L<sup>d</sup>”.

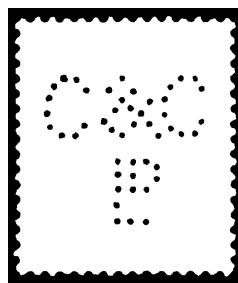
Dated examples for the modified die “C&C/L<sup>d</sup>” (C1420.01) indicate the incomplete “d” existed until at least April 1892, but by 1894 it had been ‘tidied up’ by the addition of a new pin.

1887-1893



Incomplete “d”

1893-1895



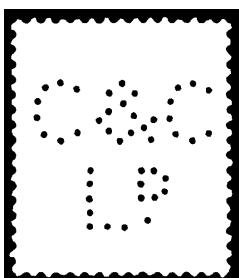
Complete “d”



Sometime around 1895 the old ‘modified’ die was replaced by two new dies, one for use in London and the other for Stockport. The Stockport die lasted for around 50 years and is shown first. Examples of it on large format stamps and multiples point to the die being single headed.

Stockport Die.

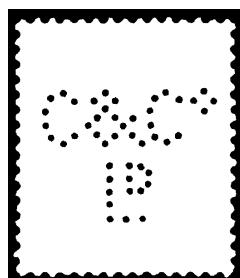
1895-1945



C1430.01

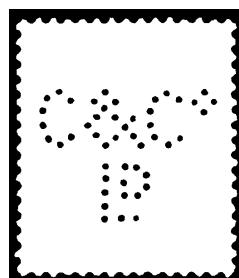
London Dies.

1895-1920



C1600.07

1930-1945



C1600.01

There is a small time gap between the two London dies since the earlier die has so far only been reported up to King George V typos (Royal Cypher wmk), and the ‘replacement’ die starts with King George V typos (Block Cypher wmk). *Can anyone bridge the gap?*

Peak ‘hat’ production was probably achieved in the years leading up to the First World War with as many as 3,000 employees working for ‘Christy & Co Ltd’ in Stockport alone. However, from that time on it was a steady decline with their Gracechurch Street headquarters and Bermondsey factory closing in 1953. Naturally, Stockport became the focal point, but that too was closed in 1997, and the factory demolished in 2000. Fortunately, the company still operates today but on a more modest scale from premises in Tottington, near Bury.

Oh, I nearly forgot, the derivation of the saying ‘***Mad as a Hatter***’!

Apparently dangerous mercury compounds were used to process the rabbit fur used in the production of felt and cheap ‘Top’ hats. Inevitably, working in poorly ventilated workshops, the hatters would breathe in the toxic fumes and accumulate the poisonous metal in their bodies. Over time this would lead to brain damage, trembling, loss of memory, loss of co-ordination, and slurred speech.